



Farmworker Camps are Congregate Settings and Outbreaks Must Be Reported to the CD Branch

COVID-19 is a reportable disease and outbreaks among farmworkers living in congregate/residential settings in North Carolina must be reported to the Communicable Disease (CD) Branch Epi on call at 919-733-3419. Farmworkers who live in migrant camps typically live in housing with 10-15 other people, but some camps house up to 200 persons. Farmworkers are a unique population given the many barriers to healthcare access, such as language, lack of independent transportation, lack of insurance, fear regarding immigration status, unfamiliarity with local resources and system, and their inability to self-isolate at home.

Employers who provide temporary housing to workers, such as farmers and farm labor contractors, are required by OSHA standards to immediately report any suspected or confirmed communicable diseases to the Local Health Department (LHD). This notification can be used as an opportunity to quickly initiate an outbreak investigation and implement infection control measures, in collaboration with local farmworker health clinics.

The investigation and implementation of control measures are complex and require cooperation among different agencies, healthcare providers, farmworker outreach workers, community groups, farm owners, farm managers, camp superintendents and housing providers. This guidance is intended to provide a general overview of some of the activities with which the LHDs will be involved.

Establish Your Team

1. Assemble your Epi Team and assign an investigation lead
 - a. The Epi Team should also include at minimum a Spanish-speaking employee or interpreter.
2. Identify your contacts at the Division of Public Health (DPH).
 - a. The regional Technical Assistance and Training Program (TATP) nurse can assist.
3. Identify community resources.
 - a. Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) or Migrant and Community Health Centers <https://www.nc211.org/resources-uninsured>.
 - b. Farmworker health clinics <https://www.ncfhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-NCFHP-and-MHC-Map.pdf>. Outreach workers can assist with communicating with workers. They specialize in providing health education and case management services and have been reaching out to camps, mainly by phone, to provide COVID-19 educational messages and assessment of needs. They are not public health or health care providers, so they will not be able to provide clinical services unless it is in partnership with their clinical team.
 - c. Community organizations.
4. Establish contacts at the farm (NC Department of Labor's Agricultural Safety and Health Bureau, Beth Rodman at 919-707-7810, can be helpful if there are issues establishing a reliable contact at the farm – you can also make a request through your DPH contacts).
 - a. For additional information on ill employees: speak with farm owner, camp superintendent, or farmworker health outreach worker.
 - b. Management of close contacts.

Initial Contact with the Farm

- Provide available COVID-19 guidelines:
 - NC guidance on congregate living settings: <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/covid-19/interim-covid-guidance-congregate-living-settings.pdf>.
 - NC DHHS guidance on migrant farmworkers: <https://www.ncfhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Nc-Interim-Guidance-for-Migrant-Farmworkers-Employers-and-Housing-Providers-002march-26-2020.pdf>.
 - NC DOL guidance: <https://www.labor.nc.gov/documents/ash-guidance-alert-farmworkers-and-covid-19>.
- Gather initial information on farmworkers/employees (see checklist for more detail). This is a significant request for information, and it may take several calls/meetings to get what is needed.
 - Basic information about farm and camp(s).
 - Number of farm employees/number of camps or residences/number of employees per residence.
 - Number of shifts and employees per shift.
 - Initial information on total number of people on the farms, numbers of positive, negative and exposed.
 - Initial information on congregate housing and if any farmworkers have been moved out of the normal housing to be isolated or quarantined.
 - Request use of a line list to track positive employees in a format that allows for sharing information with the LHD.
 - Ask for and review the farm's sick policy.
 - Determine testing capability and plans for testing.
 - Review screening and exclusion practices and availability on the farm for isolation and quarantine housing.
 - Determine whether health education was provided or collaborate with the Farmworker Health Outreach worker, if available, to ensure health education.
 - Review plan for contact tracing at the farm.
- Set schedule/method for regular meetings/contact.
 - Daily contact will likely be required initially, but frequency should reflect need.
 - Set up expectations for what information you would like during your daily contact.

Case Investigations

- Investigate cases in your jurisdiction and complete NCEDSS event.
 - Minimum data points needed:
 - Demographic information
 - Onset date or date of specimen collection for asymptomatic cases
 - Hospitalization Information
 - Clinical Outcome – died/survived
 - Lab Results
 - Risk history package – especially Congregate Living section
 - Administrative package – Disease Report Information and County of Residence
- Link case event to outbreak event in NCEDSS.

- Update the 'Counts' and 'Laboratory Methods' sections of the Results Package in NCEDSS twice weekly **before** the DHHS website update on Tuesday and Friday mornings. Important data fields that will need to be updated are:
 - Date of earliest illness onset
 - Date of last illness onset
 - Facility name
 - Facility type
 - Number of cases in residents and staff
 - Number of deaths in residents and staff
 - Note: When entering case counts into NCEDSS, "residents" are those who live in the facility's congregate housing and "staff" are those who do not live in the facility's congregate housing.
- If there are any changes to the housing situation after the initial outbreak report, please provide these updates to your regional TATP nurse.
- For cases in your jurisdiction that are part of an outbreak in another jurisdiction:
 - Link the NCEDSS event to the outbreak.
 - Share the event with the jurisdiction investigating the outbreak.
 - Email the CD nurse in the county with the outbreak to notify of the new case.

Contact Tracing – Responsibility

- The farm owner should help with contact tracing on the farm.
 - Farm owner should report:
 - Number of contacts
 - Number of contacts assessed and given monitoring instructions
 - Number of symptomatic contacts identified
 - Number of contacts tested
- LHDs are responsible for contract tracing in the community.
 - Each jurisdiction is responsible for contact tracing for cases that live in their jurisdiction, even if the farm is in a different jurisdiction.

Contact Tracing – Procedure

- Identify household and community contacts including contact with other crews.
See contact tracing information: <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/cd/coronavirus.html>
 - Symptomatic workers and other contacts
 - Exclude from work and provide home isolation guidance
 - Special emphasis must be given for employees that live together or with family. Employees must understand the need to self-isolate.
 - Farmers may not have the ability to provide isolation housing for symptomatic workers with separate restroom and kitchen on the farm. 211 operators have up-to-date information on isolation housing available by county.
 - Farmers may not have the ability to provide quarantine housing for asymptomatic, exposed workers with separate transportation, restroom and kitchen on the farm. Not all isolation housing is available to asymptomatic, exposed workers, but they must be kept separate from unexposed workers

for 14 days. Other housing alternatives or cohorting strategies may need to be found.

- Facilitate the collection of specimens for COVID-19 testing
 - Primary care provider
 - FQHC facility
 - LHD can collect and submit to SLPH
- Criteria for testing broadened
 - Fever with or without **any other symptom** *or*
 - Cough *or*
 - Shortness of breath
 - Note: As some farmworkers live in congregate housing and have strong disincentives to report symptoms, testing of asymptomatic contacts is recommended when capacity permits. Asymptomatic workers who test negative should remain quarantined until the end of their quarantine period. Any worker who tests positive, regardless of symptom status, must remain isolated and cannot work until they have completed isolation.
- Exposed asymptomatic workers who choose to continue working may be allowed to continue working if they are able to be transported, housed and work separately from unexposed workers and follow infection prevention guidance.
 - At least daily symptom monitoring must occur with report to farmer (before starting work is recommended)
 - Do you feel well today?
 - Have you felt feverish in the past 24 hours?
 - Have you had a sore throat in the past 24 hours?
 - Have you had a headache in the past 24 hours?
 - Have you had unusual body aches in the past 24 hours?
 - Have you had a cough in the past 24 hours?
 - Can you taste and smell food as usual?
 - Can work if use face mask, social distancing, and strict disinfection processes https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/Essential-Critical-Workers_Dos-and-Donts.pdf
 - If become symptomatic, then exclude from work and collect specimen for testing

Assess Needs of Workers Requiring Isolation/Quarantine

- Is housing adequate for isolation of symptomatic workers and/or quarantine of asymptomatic but exposed workers?
- Other support needed? Housing, food, medical supplies, transportation, medical care
- Resources to fill needs:
 - Farmer may be able to provide temporary housing, food, water, and medical supplies
 - Note: NC Department of Labor's Agricultural Safety & Health Bureau must be informed (by farmer) of all changes in farmworker housing
 - NC Farmworker Health Program in the Office of Rural Health
 - Community Groups

- Non-congregate housing assistance <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/covid19/assistance/non-congregate-sheltering>
- Call 2-1-1 for specific local resources including isolation and quarantine housing, if needed
- Contact local emergency management with unmet needs and details <https://www.ncdps.gov/emergency-management/em-community/directories/counties>

Additional Information and Resources for LHD, Farmworkers, Farmers, and Housing Providers

- Shared or congregate housing: <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/covid-19/interim-covid-guidance-congregate-living-settings.pdf>.
- Implementing Safety Practices [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html?utm_campaign=What to Do If You Have COVID-19 Confirmed Positive or Exposed Workers&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html?utm_campaign=What%20to%20Do%20If%20You%20Have%20COVID-19%20Confirmed%20Positive%20or%20Exposed%20Workers&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua).
- Criteria to discontinue home isolation: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html>
- Farmers and Farmworkers: <https://covid19.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/03/covid-19-resources-for-farmers-and-farmworkers-migrant-seasonal-and-h2a/> and <https://www.ncfhp.org/resources/covid-19-recommendations-for-farmworker-health-programs/>
- Most Migrant and Community Health Centers may be able to provide telehealth evaluation, and some can provide COVID-19 testing at sliding scale fees <https://www.ncfhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-NCFHP-and-MHC-Map.pdf>.
- H2A workers have 60 days from entry into the country to sign up for heavily subsidized and thus affordable health insurance on the national marketplace. Migrant and Community Health Centers have bilingual patient navigators that can assist them in signing up <https://www.ncfhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-NCFHP-and-MHC-Map.pdf>.
- Disposition of food: <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/what-do-if-you-have-covid-19-confirmed-positive-or-exposed-workers-your-food-production-storage-or>. There is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19 regardless of the status of the worker. The FDA does not anticipate that food products will need to be recalled or be withdrawn from the market should a person that works on a farm or in a food facility test positive for COVID-19.